

**Ministry Perspectives—Romans 15:15-16—2/1/2026**

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Today is the beginning of my 26<sup>th</sup> year in ministry in this local church.

You know that because next Sunday the elders & you all have planned a celebration of my 25 years here.

You are all so incredibly gracious with me & I praise God for His grace to share life in His body with such an amazing church family.

We're also celebrating 18 ½ years of Greg John on staff & 17 of Chris Goerner on staff & I cannot imagine life without them.

I think of how many of you were here before I arrived & you endured the early years of transition & faithfully prayed & loved & served.

God brought wind in our sails through others of you later.

I am so grateful & as I approached this milestone, I came across a sermon I had done from an unlikely passage that seemed timely.

A few weeks ago, we were reminded by Ernie Baker from Romans 15:14 that Christians are competent to counsel.

Paul was convinced that the Roman Christians—and by application all Christians at some level—were able to admonish one another.

And that word admonish means to put into mind, to counsel.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all counseling one another in what we say or do not say in relationships.

And if you have the Bible & know any amount of truth, you can counsel others biblically with that truth.

But as you hear that—especially if you are new or you are young—you may ask what you could say when others know more than you do.

I've heard of people who were not sure they could serve here because we have gifted teachers or people seem so mature.

Is that a proper mindset for an established church?

As we grow, do you ever assume that someone else will take care of a need or others can do it better so they should?

Excuses like those can tempt us to stay comfortable & avoid serving.

Or all kinds of discouragements can also sap our motivation.

So as we celebrate God's blessings, I want to recall some perspectives on ministry that we can glean from Paul's words in Romans 15:15-16.

Paul had a lens through which he viewed ministry—like a set of biblical glasses to see life & relationships rightly.

And we want to use those lenses to shape our views of who we are as Christians & how we should think about ministry & serving.

Paul's perspectives can teach us about parenting & serving as children or as new Christians or during health struggles.

We find answers to how you should think about being in a church where many people are well-taught & seem to have right answers.

As I meditated on Paul's words in Romans 15:15-16, I found that these verses have a lot to teach us.

Look at Romans 15:15-16 & let's find 4 ministry perspectives that can reframe our lives & refresh us in all we do.

To get some of the context, read Romans 15:14-21. [READ]

At this point, Paul had just finished his section on how to love other Christians who are different in chapters 14-15.

After Paul had explained & exhorted & encouraged his readers, he affirmed their readiness for ministry in verse 14.

The believers in Rome had enough grasp of God & His Gospel that they could be fruitfully engaged in ministry to one another.

And look—the same is true of you today if you are a Christian.

If you have the Spirit living in you and have God’s Word to seek Him and study, then you can serve Him and His people.

To explain Paul’s boldness in making such a claim & in other things he wrote, he offered some perspectives in verses 15-16.

We find 4 ministry perspectives in verses 15-16 today.

With each one, we’ll walk through details of what Paul said for his situation & then we’ll ponder how it applies to us today.

Remember: we do not live when Paul did or have the gifts Paul did and we certainly do not have the special calling he did.

But once we grasp how he viewed his life and calling, we can apply those ministry perspectives to our own lives and callings.

Point #1—all Christians need reminders of truth—that seems very basic, but it needs to be said—all Christians need reminders of truth.

Read verse 15 again to find that point. [READ]

Paul wrote rather boldly to this church that he had not founded and had never visited, particularly in some parts of his letter.

Of course, he did have relationships with some in the church.

But since his words appeared strong in some parts, he was explaining why that was to be expected and accepted.

And the first reason he implied is that he was merely reminding them of truths that they already knew or should have known.

He used a mega-compound tongue-twister word to say it.

The word has the root word for *remember* or *recall* with two prefixes added that mean *up* or *upon* and *up* or *again*.

So the idea is that he wrote for them to recall up again.

Picture truths nestled in their brains somewhere from hearing before so they should agree when he recalled them up again.

If you go back through Romans, you see appeals to what they knew or what we all know or questions asking did they not know this or that.

For example, think of the familiar Romans 8:28—it begins with those words, “*and we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God*” and so on.

In stating truth as life-transforming & all-encompassing as Romans 8:28, he began with a collective appeal to agree that we all know this.

He was simply reminding his readers what is true of God.

But why did Paul recall up again that truth for the Romans?

He did it because all Christians need reminders of truth, right?

Last time I checked, our memories are not perfect & we forget, right?

Kids—that’s why it’s so great to memorize verses & study God’s Word while you are young.

When your minds are young, more stuff sticks in there easily.

But even people with the best of memories forget stuff.

And when we face trials or we are tempted in various ways, we can also easily forget vital & helpful truths.

In those times and at all times, we need reminders of truths.

Get this—Paul’s perspective on ministry to people while we are still battling the flesh in this fallen world was that he knew we all forget.

For evidence of the danger of forgetting, read Deuteronomy & count how many times Moses said to remember or not forget.

This ministry perspective is so empowering & freeing & motivating.

It means you don’t need to be intimidated if you haven’t studied every issue as if you can’t say anything helpful.

You can help if you know the basic truths of the Gospel & have sought to apply them to your own life.

You can minister simply by recalling truth up to mind again.

We can do that with others just by asking them questions.

So much of life boils down to questions of what we are believing or wanting or worshipping in a situation.

Or we may simply need the reminder of God’s love or forgiveness or grace to lift us with comfort or hope.

Of course, we can & should grow & develop & become more skilled & more caring as we minister to each other.

But at its most basic level, a lot of ministry is reminding each other of the truths that we already know and affirm.

Just as we are strengthened by love expressed by a family member, it can be simple, familiar truths we need to hear again.

That’s why out of the mouths of babes often comes timely wisdom.

And I thank God for how you all live this care for each other.

I know I need it & we never grow too old for this because the Apostle Paul offered this perspective as a reason for his boldness.

The Apostle Peter gave this same perspective in his dying letter in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:12-15 when he wrote, *“Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.”*

Peter knew his departure was soon—meaning he was going to die.

Yet his perspective on ministry as he prepared to die was that he just needed to remind Christians of truth.

When you know that like Peter & Paul did, it can give you boldness.

It can give you faith that you do have something to offer, that you can care for others by asking questions & sharing truths.

One question to ask is: “How does the Gospel apply to this situation?”.

If you lack faith to step out & talk, take heart in this basic perspective that all Christians need reminders of truth.

So others probably need to hear what you may have to share.

And on the other side, when others DO remind us of truth, let’s be careful to recall that WE need reminders too.

So our default response should be “Thank you!” & not “I KNOW!” or some other defensive reaction.

This perspective means that we need to RECEIVE those reminders with thankfulness & humility too.

We want friendships & fellowship & accountability that gives & receives timely reminders of truth.

Then we can grow together as we share truth because of this 1<sup>st</sup> point that all Christians need reminders of truth.

Next, point #2—all Christians have gifts to serve.

I know you know that but I’m practicing the 1<sup>st</sup> point.

Point #2—all Christians have gifts to serve.

Following this takes work, so read verses 15-16. [READ]

Paul wrote boldly because of the grace that was given to him by God.

There are 3 *emphases* there on God’s gracious action of giving.

This was grace, meaning it was not something Paul deserved or earned, but what God decided to give freely.

And it was grace given, meaning God initiated and acted.

And it was given by God, clearly again highlighting this was God’s sovereign choice and merciful bestowal of grace on Paul.

But what was this grace given by God?

Verse 16 goes on to explain that it was Paul’s calling as a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.

It was Paul’s commission as an Apostle to the Gentiles.

In the accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 and in Acts 26, the Lord Jesus mentioned sending Paul to the Gentiles.

Paul mentioned that calling also in Galatians 2 & Ephesians 3.

He called himself the Apostle to the Gentiles in Romans 11:13 and referred to that apostleship as a grace in Romans 1:5.

So this was Paul’s unique gifting and calling from God to go to the Gentiles and spread the Gospel among them.

He wrote boldly because of God’s grace giving him that apostolic role.

And Paul viewed that as a stewardship and as a privilege.

It was not just a duty, because it was God’s kindness that entrusted this opportunity to him.

That gracious gifting from God emboldened him for his work.

But this is not the only time Paul wrote about grace given in reference to individual gifts and calling.

This is not the only place where Paul’s talk of grace was not referring to salvation but to the special gifting by God in a Christian.

This language was also used in Romans 12:6 to describe the grace given to each Christian in God gifting us to serve.

And that’s where I get our 2<sup>nd</sup> point of application that we can learn from Paul’s perspective on his life and ministry.

Paul saw his giftedness as a grace from God, as a blessing and joy that gave him purpose and passion for living and serving.

He was amazed that God had work for him to do & encouraged that God gifted him for the work so he stayed engaged in that work.

So listen—Paul’s response wasn’t, “Do I have to serve?”

His response was, “Wow! I GET to serve because the very God who made me and saved me has chosen to equip and empower me!”

That sense of this being about God’s grace to bless him with ability and opportunity fueled his boldness in all he did.

And we need to understand our spiritual gifts in that same light—they are GIFTS—meaning God gave them by His grace and they are evidences of His love and goodness to us.

That gives us a boldness to obey His Word to serve others & use our gifts.

And since God gifted us, we get the joy of serving Him.

That’s the right perspective to have on ministry.

And God gives a variety of spiritual gifts because He knows each local body needs all those gifts working together.

Whatever your gifts are and however God has enabled you to serve, you need to view it as a wondrous grace of God.

It is a pleasure to be enjoyed and a passion to be employed.

Don’t let your gifts sit unused collecting dust while your soul wastes away in selfishness or worldliness.

Realize that all Christians have gifts to serve and get serving.

If you don’t know how you are gifted, just look for needs and opportunities and start doing what you can to help.

As you do so, God will direct & we can watch God work.

So #1— all Christians need reminders of truth; and #2, all Christians have gifts to serve.

Now #3—all Christians serve God by serving people.

Again that may sound simple but we need to say it.

Point #3—all Christians serve God by serving others.

We can’t assume we can serve God all alone away from people & that’s what this next basic perspective on ministry from Paul corrects.

Serving God even when we are alone in prayer is often focused on expressing our heart for other people.

Our love for our invisible God is shown by serving visible people.

Paul gave this ministry perspective by the language he used to describe his ministry to the Gentiles in verse 16. [READ]

That word for minister is the word we get the English word ‘liturgy’ from & it’s often used of religious servants like OT priests & Levites in the tabernacle or Temple.

It can refer to a public servant like a governing official in Romans 13:6, but here it is coupled with a word for servicing as a priest or performing holy service.

Paul’s religious service was focused on the Gospel—he was presenting and modeling and explaining and applying the Gospel.

It was God’s Gospel—God originated and owned the Gospel and Paul was just a servant to pass it on to others.

Paul’s ceremonial language presented this as his sacred duty.

Ritual language is also used in referring to the Gentiles as an offering Paul would present as acceptable to God.

It's easy to pass over how strange that picture is—Paul was serving the Gospel to Gentiles so that he might offer the Gentiles up to God.

Obviously he was not going to kill Gentiles and burn them like OT priests did with animals as offerings.

But he said that the Gentiles saved through his ministry would be his sacrificial offering on God's altar.

And the Gospel is what would make them acceptable.

The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus has already made the sacrifice necessary to pay for our sins and make us acceptable.

Only in Jesus can we be accepted by God.

But through faith in that wondrous Gospel of Jesus, we can be an offering that is accepted by God.

We can enter new life by the power of Jesus' resurrection and become living sacrifices worshipping God by all we do.

As Romans 12:1 says: *present your bodies a living & holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

And Paul's perspective on his ministry was that he was also offering up to God all those saved through his ministry.

Paul's service of God was focused on reaching people, teaching people, and preparing people as holy offerings to God.

That's not typically a one-hour, one-time investment & it's not merely information sharing—it's people—and Paul's efforts as an apostle and evangelist and pastor and teacher were given to transforming and training souls to offer to God.

Think of that—do you think that way about your worship of God?

We can be so self-absorbed in personal relationship with God that we forget His purpose for us to represent Him to others.

As 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:18 puts it, we are His ambassadors, sent out to plead with others to be reconciled to God.

And then our calling in the church is not to sit back and assume everyone is ok, but to warn against falling away and to encourage each other to press on & be real.

That requires relationships that can be messy at times.

Spiritual gifts are not primarily for podcasts or posts to unknown followers—they are for first for the local church.

Yes, God does promise to keep all those who are His—but He keeps us by efforts of leaders & parents & prayer warriors & teachers & the church body caring for each other's souls.

It happens first just by being here—being present & committed to regular investments & conversations.

We serve people for God's glory & not our own.

So our God-centered passions should drive us to other-centered serving to reach people and train them for heaven.

I praise God for how you model this kind of serving as a church.

And this means that you may best use your gifts in ways that do not show up on a ministry schedule or organizational chart.

People are the ministry—programs exist to serve people—we must remember that we serve God by serving people.

Yet as we do so, we must also remember that we also always depend upon the Spirit of God to accomplish every good work.

And that's our last point we get from the end of verse 16—look at it.

The end of verse 16 says these saved Gentiles that Paul pictures as an offering are sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

So we say as a 4<sup>th</sup> point today that all Christians depend on the Spirit.

Point #4—all Christians depend on the Spirit—we depend on the Spirit to sanctify us and to sanctify others.

So we depend on the Spirit to grow us & to grow others.

To be sanctified is to be set apart as holy, to be separated from other, common things to be specially used in serving God.

Vessels like cups were sanctified in that way for use in the Tabernacle and Temple in the OT in Israel.

And the idea of being sanctified also meant being morally set apart as holy in lifestyle and choices and heart and actions.

So to be sanctified meant both a new purpose and place in life and a new pattern and practice for life.

What Paul referred to here was that sanctified lifestyle that starts with the sanctified position of being in Christ by faith.

We know a transformed, holy life is what Paul meant because the obedience of the Gentiles was his parallel goal in verse 18.

That obedience starts with obeying the Gospel by trusting Christ and then it grows in a life of obedience to Christ.

So when a person comes to Christ by faith, we begin an ever-increasing transformation to greater holiness.

We become more like Jesus as we grow in sanctification.

Sanctification starts when we quit trying to be good on our own & trust Jesus as the only One good enough to get us to God.

When we trust Jesus as our only hope, as the 1 who saves from sin & whom we follow as our Lord, then we begin to change.

We begin to be more sanctified or holy.

Since we can't do that on our own, we trust God to change us.

We begin to change because we begin to be changed by the Holy Spirit working in us.

That growing process is called sanctification—and that's what Paul was longing for with the Gentiles.

We as Christians depend on the Holy Spirit for that work in us.

And we depend on Holy Spirit to do that same work in others.

We do all those things in faith, trusting God to use them as He wishes.

Then we pray, telling God what He's promised and asking Him for work for His glory.

Get that—we trust God's Spirit to use the means He has given.

We read our Bibles & sing & serve & evangelize & disciple & counsel depending not on those acts or ourselves, but on God to use what He said He would by His Spirit.

We try to be biblical & faithful, but we depend on the Spirit to do the needed supernatural work.

We pray fervently because we depend on God to work and we pray submissively because ultimately it is His work.

That ministry perspective kept Paul going when things were going well and when things were NOT going well.

It kept him faithful when people were responding to the Gospel as he preached and when people were hating him for what he preached.

Leaving results in God's hands as we depend on the Spirit is so freeing to make us bold and to keep us from despair.

If God's Spirit is the One who must work, we just want to be faithful to what the Spirit has said in His Word and leave the results to Him.

We don't have to worry or get angry or depressed or have all those other reactions we're tempted to have as we serve.

We can rest as we depend on the Spirit.

And by the way, note the mention of the Trinity in these verses.

God the Father gave grace so that Paul became a minister of Christ Jesus for people to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

All 3 Persons are involved in all God does with all Christians.

And all Christians (1) need reminders of truth, (2) have gifts to serve, (3) serve God by serving others, and (4) depend on the Spirit.

I pray those are helpful ministry perspectives from Paul's mind that show how God framed his life and approach to serving.

Think of the ministry opportunities you have and think through these ministry perspectives to gain some help and hope.

God has graciously given us roles and responsibilities, relationships and opportunities.

It is grace from God to teach or serve adults or kids or youth or babies or to clean a room or mow a lawn or make a meal or meet a need.

Do you view it that way and embrace it as seeking an offering you want to give to God?

It is a privilege for God to give us the chance to enjoy His gifting and power through us in serving others.

Do you think that way about opportunities you have?

And that's true not merely in church ministries, but also in our homes and at our jobs and in other relationships.

Parents, God has entrusted you with children.

Do you see your role with them as a grace from God in which you long to offer them up to God as sanctified by the Spirit.

We serve God by serving the people He puts in our paths and those people can be our offering to God as we lead them toward faithfully following Christ.

Do you pray for others with that heart of wanting to worship God by giving others to God sanctified by the Spirit?

I thank God for the ways I see many of you flourishing in these perspectives in the areas of life and ministry where you serve.

Don't give up and don't lose heart.

I pray these ministry perspectives bring some fresh biblical light to renew you in all that you do.

And the marvel of all this is that our lives and ministries can be ACCEPTABLE to God because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our sins condemn us under the righteous wrath of God & yet Jesus endured that wrath in the place of all who trust Him.

He rose in victory to prove we can trust Him now & forever.

His blood is the only fountain that can cleanse sinners.

And His body is the One body of the God who became Man to give Himself as the Substitute to pay sin's penalty in our place.

We close now by remembering that wondrous work of Christ in the ceremony of communion, or the Lord's Table.

We do so together—gathered as one body with Him as our head.

That's why He said to examine our relationships in the body & with Him so that we remember Him in a worthy manner.

He is the one and only Savior & we take in His body & blood symbolically as we have done in faith spiritually as He said in John 6.

That's why you should only participate in this ceremony if you have taken Jesus in by faith, united with Him by surrendering your life to His rule with rest in His grace.

If you have not turned from sin to faith in Christ, we urge you just to watch & seek Him that you might know Him & be saved.

But if you do know Christ, we welcome you to join us in remembering Him in the Lord's Supper.

Pray with me as we prepare to remember Him until He comes again.